



# Phya Khankhaak, the Toad King

(Thailand)

Once long ago, there was a prosperous kingdom ruled by King Ekthita and Queen Sida. After a long time, the queen conceived. The court astrologer predicted that the prince would be most meritorious and powerful. Everyone was waiting to behold this infant with high hopes. Ten lunar months went by and the queen was in labour.

The royal midwife looked at the royal infant and was shocked. She silenced the servants, "Don't say a word about the fact that this royal infant looks like a toad."

And so no one uttered a word. But when the royal infant was presented to the king, he cried with joy. "Oh, my royal meritorious son, you do look like a toad. But I love you. Look at your complexion, it is golden."

"I proclaim the name of my royal son to be "Khankhaak Kuman" or "The Toad Prince, Khankhaak." And that is the name of our hero. Everyone loved the toad prince. He was such a delightful fellow.

When he grew up to be a young prince, he went to his royal father. "Father, I am old enough to get married. I wish to have a castle of ten thousand pillars and one thousand rooms decorated with gems and jewels. And I wish to have the most beautiful maiden as my wife."

"Son, I could have the castle built for you, but to ask for a hand of any



beautiful woman to be your wife might not be possible. You look like a toad, my dear son,” said his father.

The toad prince was full of disappointment and returned to his palace, thinking of what to do. Then, he thought of Indra, the highest god in heaven. He put his hands together and prayed to Indra.

“Oh, dear Indra, please help to fulfil my wish, for my father could not do so for me.”

After making that wish he went to sleep. He slept so soundly that he hardly knew what happened that night. Indra came to bless him and bestowed everything that he had wished for. When he woke up, he was in the most splendid castle of ten thousand pillars and one thousand rooms decorated with gems and jewels. He peeled off his toad-like form and was turned into the most handsome prince. When he looked beside him, there was a heavenly maid.

“Oh, are you a human or a heavenly being?” asked the toad prince.

“I am a human princess from the northern hemisphere. Indra brought me here to be your wife, my lord. My name is Nang Kaew-udon,” replied the mysterious lady.

And so they talked and got to know each other. They became husband and wife that very night.

The next day, the entire court was greatly startled with the appearance of the new castle. They informed the king and queen about this. So, the king went

to the toad prince's palace. With amazement and awe, he saw a handsome prince and a beautiful maiden in this splendid castle. Once he learned that it was his own toad prince son, he relinquished the throne to his son and his daughter-in-law.

The toad prince now was entitled, "Phya Khankhaak, the Toad King." He ruled the city with compassion and generosity. The kind and generous queen Nang Kaew-udon contributed to his fame as the most meritorious king by setting up food pavilions for the poor.

Not long after that, the fame of this king and queen spread throughout the earth and the universe. Human kings, heavenly beings, demi-heavenly creatures endowed with magical powers like the naga, garuda, demons, animals, and insects came to pay respects and homage to him. They came with tributes and emissaries to present to the king and queen.

But not one single creature remembered to hold a ceremony to pay tributes to the rain god, Phya Thaen. He became so humiliated that he did not permit the naga to play in the heavenly lakes to make rain for the earthlings. Horrible fires broke out in every forest. All this happened outside the palace walls so the king and queen had no knowledge of this catastrophe.

After seven years, seven months, and seven days, the subjects of Phya Khankhaak came to ask for help. Phya Khankhaak went to visit the Naga King to find out the cause of this disastrous drought. Like most Thai-Lao people, Phya Khankhaak believed that the naga's bathing, playing, and tail lashing in the rain god's, Phya Thaen's, lake in heaven is the origin of rain on earth.



Once he learned that Phya Thaen refused to let the naga play in the heavenly lake, he organized a great army of all humans, animals, insects, demons, and heavenly beings to go to heaven to fight Phya Thaen. Once the bridge between heaven and earth was created with the help of all creatures, they marched up to heaven, singing their marching song:

<i>Oh, oh, what a woe!</i>	<i>Thaen has been our foe,</i>
<i>For he refused</i>	<i>to bestow rain on earth.</i>
<i>Come one come all;</i>	<i>let us go to fight Thaen.</i>
<i>From that crowd come</i>	<i>wasps, hornets, and bees.</i>
<i>Those beautiful creature</i>	<i>are deer with bright eyes.</i>
<i>Those with golden bodies</i>	<i>are beautiful heavenly beings or thewada.</i>
<i>This crowd of beings</i>	<i>are frogs and toads of all kinds.</i>
<i>Those dignified animals</i>	<i>are garuda, naga, and lions.</i>
<i>Oh, oh, what a woe!</i>	<i>Thaen has been our foe,</i>
<i>For he refused</i>	<i>to bestow rain on earth.</i>
<i>Come one come all;</i>	<i>let us go to fight Thaen.</i>
<i>Those approaching are</i>	<i>wood mites, termites, dogs, and bears.</i>
<i>And these are</i>	<i>eagles, porcupines, civet cats, and tigers.</i>
<i>Those splendid creatures</i>	<i>are pheasants and swans.</i>
<i>Those cheerful creatures are</i>	<i>apes, monkeys, elephants, and horses.</i>
<i>Those in the front row</i>	<i>are flying lemurs and cuckoo birds.</i>
<i>Oh, oh, what a woe!</i>	<i>Thaen has been our foe,</i>
<i>For he refused</i>	<i>to bestow rain on earth.</i>
<i>Come one come all;</i>	<i>let us go to fight Thaen.</i>

And so the battle began. After a long, perilous, and miraculous battle, Phya Khankhaak won. He then taught Phya Thaen to be just and to bestow rain to the universe seasonally.

“You must promise to send rain to earth when the rice planting season comes,” ordered Phya Khankhaak, the Toad King.

“Yes, I promise. However, if I forget, I would like the humans to send up rockets to remind me of the appropriate time to send rains. Then, I will call the naga to come play in the heavenly lake to make rains for the earthlings.”

“So, let that become our customary rite for fertility. We will have the rocket festival when there is no sign of rain in the rice planting season,” said Phya Khankhaak, the Toad King.

After enjoying Phya Thaen’s heaven for a few months, Phya Khankhaak came back to rule the fertile earth happily. Every once in a while, Phya Khankhaak would recount the story of how he led a great army to fight Phya Thaen and how he enjoyed spending some time in heaven after his victory.



## Supplementary information

- The story of Phya Khankaak that appears in this publication is an abridged version of a long, epic poem that has roots in Isan (the north-eastern region of Thailand).
- In this story the queen was pregnant for ten months (instead of just the normal nine months) to signify that the baby will be born meritorious.
- **Meritorious** is an adjective derived from the word “merit.” In Buddhist belief, for persons to be reborn as a human being, they must accumulate merit through good deeds from their many previous lives. If they have accumulated enough merit they would have “high birth” and will be respected by others. In general (if not in Buddhistic belief), this term could be equivalent to the word “charisma” and its adjective, “charismatic.”
- It is believed that the Buddha was a toad, as Phya Khankaak, in one of his past lives. Folktales in general often portray the toad as an animal that brings rain, as also seen in Heaven’s Uncle Toad.
- The **naga** in Buddhist myths are large serpent-like or dragon-like creatures. The naga also appears in the story The Mon Prince and the Naga Princess.
- The **garuda** is another being that is half-bird and half-human. Like the naga, it is also prominent in Buddhist mythology.